

I claim:

1. A method for tracking blood transfusions, comprising the steps of:

(a) obtaining patient identifying information for a patient, storing said patient identifying information in a database, and providing the patient with a wristband having patient identifying information;

(b) allocating from a supply of blood a blood transfusion unit for the patient;

(c) labelling the blood transfusion unit with compatibility information including patient identifying information, and storing said compatibility information in the database;

(d) generating a blood request form for the patient, the blood request including patient identifying information;

(e) retrieving the blood transfusion unit and verifying its identity by comparing the patient identifying information on the blood request form to the patient identifying information in the compatibility information on the blood transfusion unit; and

(f) comparing the patient identifying information from the wristband to the patient identifying information in the compatibility information.

2. The method according to claim 1 including the step of providing an alarm in response to a mismatch between the patient identifying information on the blood transfusion unit and the patient identifying information on the blood request form when compared.

3. The method according to claim 1 including the step of providing an alarm in response to a mismatch between the patient identifying information

from the wristband and the patient identifying information in the compatibility information on the blood transfusion unit when compared.

4. The method according to claim 1 in which the compatibility information further includes blood unit identifying information.

5. The method according to claim 4 wherein the blood transfusion unit is labelled with a label having blood unit identifying information.

6. The method according to claim 5 including comparing the blood unit identifying information on the blood unit identifying information on the blood transfusion unit with the blood unit identifying information in the compatibility information.

7. The method according to claim 6 including providing an alarm in response to a mismatch between the blood unit identifying information on the blood transfusion unit and the blood unit identifying information in the compatibility information.

8. The method according to claim 7 including transmitting the patient identification information read from the wristband, the blood unit identification information read from the blood transfusion unit and the patient identification information and blood unit identification read from the compatibility label to a computer database.

9. A method for collecting and storing in a computer database information about blood transfusions, comprising the steps of:

(a) providing a patient with a wristband having patient identification information encoded thereon and obtaining a blood sample from the patient;

(b) reading patient identification information from the wristband and printing a blood sample identification label, the blood sample identification

label including the patient identification information, and applying the blood sample identification label to the blood sample;

(c) transmitting the patient information to a computer database each time a blood sample identification label is printed;

(d) selecting a blood unit suitable for transfusion into the patient from a supply of blood units and marking the blood unit with a unique blood unit identification code;

(e) printing and applying a compatibility label to the blood unit, the compatibility label including the patient identification information and the blood unit identification code;

(f) reading the patient identification information and the blood unit identification code from the compatibility label;

(g) reading the patient identification information from the wristband, and comparing it to the patient identification information on the compatibility label;

(h) comparing the blood unit identification code on the compatibility label with the blood unit identification code on the blood unit;

(i) providing an alarm if the patient identification information from the wristband does not match the patient identification information on the compatibility label or if the blood unit identification code on the compatibility label does not match the blood unit identification code on the blood unit; and

(j) transmitting the patient identification information read from the wristband, the blood unit identification read from the blood unit and the patient identification information and blood unit identification read from the compatibility label to a computer database.

10. The method according to claim 9 including the step of generating a blood request form for the patient, the blood request form including patient identification information.
11. The method according to claim 10 including the step of comparing the patient identification information on the blood request form to the patient identification information on the compatibility label.
12. The method according to claim 11 including providing an alarm if the patient identification information on the blood request form does not match the patient identification information on the compatibility label.
13. The method according to claim 9 including in step (h) the step of verifying that the selected blood unit has been properly stored.
14. The method according to claim 13 including providing an alarm if the selected blood unit has been improperly stored.
15. Apparatus for tracking the movement of blood products, comprising:
  - a blood product identification tag attached to each unit of said blood products, each of said blood product identification tags encoding a unique blood product identification code;
  - a caregiver identification tag for each caregiver, each of said caregiver identification tags encoding a unique caregiver identification code;
  - storage means for storing said blood products;
  - tag reading means associated with said storage means for reading blood product identification codes and caregiver identification codes; and
  - a computer coupled to said tag reading means, said computer including software for recording blood product identification codes for each

blood product stored in said storage means, and recording the caregiver identification code for each caregiver who accesses the storage means.

16. The apparatus of claim 15 wherein the blood product identification tag comprises a radio frequency identification tag.

17. The apparatus of claim 16 wherein the caregiver identification tag comprises a radio frequency identification tag.

18. The apparatus of claim 17 wherein said storage means includes a lock under the control of said computer.

19. The apparatus of claim 18 wherein said computer includes blood product identification code information for each blood product contained in said storage means.

20. The apparatus of claim 19 wherein said computer opens the lock in response to a request from a caregiver only when said request includes a blood product identification code that matches a blood product identification code for a blood product stored in said storage means.